

The impact of assumed translation and the quest for a lost original. On the history of the key text the Jamaica Letter by Simón Bolívar¹

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ABSTRACT

The *Carta de Jamaica* (1815) is considered one of the most important testimonies of the South American liberator Simón Bolívar. When the manuscript vanished, historians were left with an English translation and assumed back-translations into Spanish, which heavily impacted the (Spanish) publication history for almost two centuries. This study of the versions of the *Carta de Jamaica* and the discourse surrounding the search for the original is carried out by applying Jan Assman's text production process model. Assman's model helps identify and understand the motives guiding translation endeavors and the different functions of these versions, which makes it a valuable tool for translation-historical research on key political, cultural, or religious texts. This paper also shows how paradoxical the usage and conception of translation is: it is conceived as a problem, used as a tool of analysis, and finally becomes the solution because through translation the version "closest" to the lost original is created.

Keywords: translation history, key text, assumed translation, back-translation, Simón Bolívar

Vpliv domnevnega prevoda in iskanje izgubljenega izvirnika. O zgodovini ključnega besedila Pismo z Jamajke Simóna Bolívarja

IZVLEČEK

Carta de Jamaica (1815) velja za besedilo, ki ponuja najrelevantnejši vpogled v delo in misli južno-ameriškega osvoboditelja Simóna Bolívarja. Ko je rokopis izgubil, so zgodovinarjem ostali angleški prevod in domnevni povratni prevodi v španščino, ki so skoraj 200 let pomembno vplivali na španske objave besedila. Pričujoča študija o različicah *Carte de Jamaica* in besedilih, ki so obkrožala iskanje izvirnika, temelji na uporabi procesnega modela tvorjenja besedila Jana Assmana. Assmanov model je uporaben pri identifikaciji in razumevanju vzgibov za prevajanje besedila ter mnogoterih funkcij različnih prevodov, zato predstavlja pomembno orodje za raziskave o zgodovini prevajanja ključnih političnih, kulturnih ali verskih besedil. Poleg tega prispevek prikazuje tudi, kako paradoksalna je raba in razumevanje prevoda: zasnovan je kot problem, uporabljen kot orodje za analizo, na koncu pa postane rešitev, saj skozi prevod nastane različica, ki je »najbližja« izgubljenemu izvirniku.

Ključne besede: zgodovina prevajanja, ključno besedilo, domnevni prevod, povratni prevod, Simón Bolívar

1 This paper is based on my unpublished master's thesis completed in 2016 titled *Der kuriose Fall der ‚Carta de Jamaica‘. Ein übersetzungsgeschichtlicher Blick* [The curious case of the 'Carta de Jamaica'. A translation-historical perspective].

1. Introduction

So-called key cultural texts, i.e. the texts which have contributed to the shaping of the source culture and, in translation, have influenced the target culture (Malmkjær, Şerban and Louwagie 2018, 2), often exhibit a rich translation history. Research on (translated) key cultural texts has a long-standing tradition in translation studies and related disciplines. The attention to retranslation has also boosted this strand of research in recent years within translation studies. Studies on literary and religious, but also political and academic texts and their translations describe them, for different reasons, as sacred texts, classics, iconic texts or canonized literature. For this paper I have decided to speak of key texts to point to the ascribed function and worth of these texts for a society or culture. In a simple linear model, translation usually comes into play when the key text has already reached a certain status and is then shared with other language communities. This does not apply to the text at the center of this paper, one of the most important writings of Simón Bolívar, the South American liberator. The *Carta de Jamaica* (Jamaica Letter) written in 1815 was translated as well as presumably back- and retranslated right after its creation, long before the text became widely known and praised. In combination with the loss of the original manuscript, Bolívar admirers and historians alike were not only occupied with disseminating the text and its ideas, but also with researching its origins and finding out which available version of this letter was to be considered the original. This paper focuses on what these events reveal about translation and how translation was perceived, treated and used by different actors. It also intends to show the potential of the text production process model by Jan Assmann (1990), and how it can be made use of for the purpose of writing translation history of key texts.

First, I will give an overview of the publication history of the Jamaica Letter and introduce the phenomena of assumed translation and back-translation and their relation to translation history. The publication history of the text and the accompanying discourse are quite eventful. Over time, the author Simón Bolívar became an idolized historical figure and the private letter evolved into a building block for the ideology of *Bolivarianism*. To capture these developments, I make use of the text production process model by Jan Assmann (1990) that retraces a text from idea to tradition. The model and its methodological implications are introduced in chapter 2 and put into practice in chapters 3-6, following the stages of Assmann's text production process model. Chapter 5 includes detailed accounts of the attempts to recreate the lost original, the accompanying discourse and the cause of it all, the assumption of back-translation.

The time frame under investigation starts with the development of the ideas of the Jamaica Letter and its actual creation in 1815, and ends with the release of the

rediscovered original manuscript in 2015. The focus of this paper lies on one specific aspect of discourse on the Jamaica Letter, namely the discourse on translation. Therefore, the sources include different versions and translations of the letter, as well as sources debating or evaluating exactly those. To keep track of the different versions and translations of the letter discussed in this paper, they are numbered chronologically and marked with EN for English and ES for Spanish. The annexed table includes the full bibliographical entries the abbreviations stand for. Additionally, paratexts, reviews and secondary literature were consulted to study the discourse on translation.

2. The history of the Jamaica Letter: A lost original replaced by an assumed translation

The story of the Jamaica Letter starts with its creator, the South American liberator Simón Bolívar, who is considered a national hero in many South American and Caribbean countries for his role in the struggle for independence from the Spanish colonizers and his ideas on not only freeing, but unifying the South American people. In 1815, he was in (temporary) exile on the Caribbean island of Jamaica. On 6 September 1815 he wrote a letter in Spanish, which was later titled “Reply of a South American to a Gentleman of this Island” (Lecuna and Bierck 1951, 103), to an islander interested in his ideas. The letter became one of the thousands of documents of the South American *Libertador* collected and later published by his peers. Within two weeks, the Spanish letter (ES1) was translated into English for the recipient of the letter, the businessman Henry Cullen (EN1). Three years later in 1818, the English translation of the anonymized letter was published in a Jamaican newspaper (EN2). Since the Spanish manuscript (ES1) had vanished and the available English publications did not reveal it either, the identity of the addressee was unknown for more than a century. And, much more importantly, it was unclear whether the oldest available Spanish version from 1833 (ES2) was a back-translation from English or actually just a copy of the original manuscript (ES1). This is the basis for the discourse on the letter and on translation that followed and that this paper looks at extensively.

The discovery of the manuscript of the first English translation (EN1) in 1950 did not answer all open questions. But on the 200th anniversary of the *Carta de Jamaica* in 2015, the original Spanish manuscript from 1815 (ES1) was presented to the public (Zambrano 2015). It had been discovered in 1996 in Quito by the Ecuadorian historian Amílcar Varela. The manuscript contained an additional paragraph that was missing from all other known versions, but more importantly, it was now clear that the circulating Spanish versions, starting with ES2 and many variations deriving of it, were not back-translations via English, but rather copies of the original (ES1)

with minor edits. The history of the Jamaica Letter was, after all, a history of *assumed* back-translations. The term “assumed translation” stands for

any target-culture text for which there are reasons to tentatively posit the existence of another text, in another culture and language, from which it was presumedly derived by transfer operations and to which it is now tied by certain relationships, some of which may be regarded – within that culture – as necessary and/or sufficient (Toury 1995, 35).

As D’huilst (2012, 141) has pointed out, this concept is a useful tool for translation history, since it encompasses the forms and names of translation that vary over time and space. If the text is perceived, labeled or treated as a translation, then it is definitely a research object of interest for translation history. In the present case, we are not confronted with a non-translation posing as a translation, but with a non-translation, copy of the original, that is mistaken for a translation. In hindsight, all the suspicions and assumptions of (back-)translation that impacted the publication and translation history of the text and dominated academic discourse were unfounded. What we are left with are products of the assumption: the text comparisons and retranslations that were conducted to prove that a text was or was not a translation or the best suited version to stand in for the lost original. These publications and discussions give insight into how the assumption of translation affected the interpretation and treatment of a text and how translation was conceived of in the (academic) discourse surrounding it.

“Translated texts as survivors of lost originals” (Santoyo 2006, 28) have great cultural significance but remain as one of the blank spaces of translation history, as Santoyo observed. They “function in history as true originals, because the text from which they derived has disappeared, and the translated text has assumed the function of the original” (Santoyo 2006, 29). The suspected Spanish back-translation of the Jamaica Letter did in fact function as an original for many years, but the suspicion as such did not sit well with historians and Bolívar admirers alike. How were they supposed to hear Bolívar’s voice through the thickness of a translation of a translation? Did this text deserve to stand next to the authentic and original writings of Bolívar? These doubts triggered research activities and analyses to search for the “truth” and to find out the actual source language, the person responsible for the translation and whether they were trustworthy. The ultimate aim of these research efforts was to locate the lost manuscript.

The hunt for the manuscript of the Jamaica Letter and the laborious endeavors to reconstruct the original text carried out by historians, historiographers and institutions reveal the ideological struggle surrounding Bolívar and his writings as national heritage of South American nations, in particular Venezuela, and the influence and

authority of individual actors. It also gives insight into how translation was deployed and thought of. Translation (in the forms of translation, back-translation and retranslation) was conceived as a problem to begin with by these historians, as pointed out above. But different forms of translation also served them as analytical tools to investigate whether a particular version was or was not the sought-after “original”. At the same time, translation was also the solution, because through new translations they pursued the ideal to create a version that would be as close to the voice of the *Liber-tador* as possible. This of course would only be acceptable when the translation was carried out by the “right person” in the “right manner”. These efforts are what makes this a particularly interesting case of translation history.

3. Jan Assmann’s text production process model: From an idea to a tradition

Jan Assmann is most known for his contributions to Egyptology and Cultural Studies. He developed a model to analyze the relevance and importance of texts pertaining to a particular discourse. While Assmann explored the discourse on the concept of *Ma’at* in Ancient Egypt through an analysis of written texts that have been passed down for generations, in this paper Assmann’s methodology is used to study the discourse on translation based on texts written on the Jamaica Letter (i.e., paratexts, analyses, reviews) as well as different versions, particularly translations, of the letter that reveal how translation was used and understood.

The model splits the text production process into three stages: In the stage of *thematization*, an idea or enunciation is first brought up and made a topic of conversation. The idea might not be new but was never brought to the foreground. In the stage of *textualization*, the idea that has been addressed can take effect because it is written down. In the stage of *tradition*, codification or canonization take place, which can secure a text a lifespan of hundreds or even thousands of years (Assmann 1990, 40–51). These three stages of *thematization*, *textualization* and *tradition* are subsumed as “discourse” by Assmann to signal the importance of the social and functional relations a text exhibits. By going through the three stages of discourse, the institutionalization of an idea or thought can be analyzed. Not all texts make it through these stages, and some can get lost after textualization, which is why institutionalization is decisive. By collecting, copying, and storing the text, it can be preserved for millennia (cf. Assmann 1990, 45). In the following chapters I will go into more detail on these stages, applying the model to the discourse on the Jamaica Letter, to show the value of the model and how it can be made use of for the purpose of writing translation history.

From a translation studies perspective, the transfer and translation of the text into other languages and cultures is of particular interest, which is why I suggest that the stage of *transfer/translation* be added into the model as a stage or sub-stage of *tradition*. Furthermore, to zoom in on the role translation played to reconstruct the lost original of the Jamaica Letter, I have added the stage of *retextualization* to the model. This stage, following *textualization* and preceding but overlapping with *tradition*, focuses on the efforts to either find the original manuscript or create an original-like version legitimated by experts by relying on parallel texts, knowledge of Bolívar and the context of the letter's textualization.

Assmann's model was created for a discourse spanning several hundreds if not thousands of years. In the case of the Jamaica Letter, only two centuries have gone by and different stages overlap. The stages of *retextualization* and *tradition*, for example, are intertwined. Finding the original manuscript or recreating a "new" original version would not have been prioritized to this degree, had the letter not already been assigned an ideological function in the evolvment of the myth and the creation of a cult surrounding Bolívar and his ideas (cf. Zeuske 2011). Still, the adapted model allows me to structure the publications and events pertaining to the Jamaica Letter over the span of two centuries and thereby study the discourse on translation as a problem, tool and solution for a key text or a "representative" text.

For Assmann, a text that goes through all three stages becomes a "representative" text. This means that the text not only has literary qualities, but also social relevance and can therefore acquire space in the cultural memory of a society (cf. Assmann 1990, 46). A representative text exhibits three characteristics: it is *explicit*, *general* and *central*. In Assmannian terms, a text is explicit when it is not bound to a specific context and can function autonomously. The Jamaica Letter, for example, was a private letter which was then able to take effect beyond its original function. A text is general when it discusses fundamental issues of humankind and not the mundane. A text is central when it is selected and defended repeatedly over the course of its continuous reception. The third category, centrality, depends on the other two, since "texts that are not explicit or general can never take a central position in a society's tradition" (Assmann 1990, 48, my translation). Centrality is reliant on cultural decisions and effort, which is why there are texts from Ancient Egypt considered central and of importance by Egyptologists, although they were only preserved on a single papyrus (cf. Assmann 1990, 48). The following chapters will demonstrate that the Jamaica Letter does in fact meet the criteria for a representative text by dividing its overall history into the stages of the Assmannian model of the text production process, starting with *thematization*.

4. Themmatization: The prelude

For studies on the translation history of key texts, the work that has been done on the historical background and history of ideas can be built upon to understand when and why certain ideas were expressed for the first time and what shifts contributed to an individual consequently putting an idea on paper. The *thematization* of the Jamaica letter has to be seen in the context of the process of *Independencia*, the Latin American wars of independence at the beginning of the 19th century.

With the upheavals that occurred throughout the American continent, new scenarios were suddenly thinkable and new perspectives developed. These scenarios became a topic of conversation. In Europe, Napoleon had just been defeated in the battle of Waterloo, the Vienna Congress was well underway, the Holy Alliance was about to be formed. In South America, the struggle for liberation from the colonizers was raging (see Gómez García (2015, 209–215) for a chronology of political events in South America between 1807 and 1815). The circles most active in the wars of independence dominated not only the political stage but also historiography and knowledge production. “In fact, the Independence was the child of the intelligence and feelings of a few dozen men – nobles, writers, officers, men with a certain family tradition who wished to lead the Republic, or thinkers converted to the new philosophy” (Morón 1964, 91). Most historical accounts also focus on the achievements of a few individuals such as Simón Bolívar, who had just fled to Jamaica in 1815 after military defeats on the mainland. Bolívar was well educated, an experienced traveler and a military and political leader who certainly had knowledge and awareness with regard to political developments; in this situation, in exile, he then *textualized* his thoughts and ideas after being asked to do so by his correspondence partner Henry Cullen in the *Carta de Jamaica* on 6 September 1815. Bolívar also wrote other texts during this time and some were published in Jamaican newspapers. The extraordinary circumstances of being exiled on an island might have also contributed to him expressing himself free of the constraints and habits of his usual surroundings.

Now that we have a basic understanding of the stage of *thematization*, we can turn to *textualization*, meaning the specific communicative situation in which the letter materialized and when its content comes into play.

5. Textualization: The birth of the text

After an idea has been brought up, it enters the next stage of Assmann's model, when it is written down and it materializes as text. In the Jamaica Letter, Bolívar explained how he imagined his difficult personal situation could be resolved, and shared his ideas on how to move forward with the struggle for independence. It was not an open letter but was soon published regardless and labeled as Bolívar's first significant political speech. The only notable change was that it was anonymized and therefore addressed to "a friend". This opened the door for different interpretations and partially explains why it was possible to present it as a "propaganda letter directed towards the wider public, particularly England" (König 1985, 31, my translation). The text thus became "explicit" if we use Assmann's terminology. According to Assmann, if the text is considered a letter propagating patriotic ideas and not a personal exchange between friends, it becomes relevant beyond its original context. The content of the letter fulfills the criterion of generality: In the *Carta de Jamaica*, Simón Bolívar analyzed the events unfolding in South America, but also outlined their effects on the world (or at least Europe). He debated the advantages and drawbacks of different forms of governing and state organization, and shared his thoughts on injustice, freedom, and the history of humankind. Since the letter discusses the causality of events and shifts reaching far into the past and weighs in on potential future scenarios, it has been considered "prophetic" by his admirers, starting with the editor of the Jamaican newspaper that printed the letter in English in 1825 (EN3).²

The specific communicative situation of creation involves a handful of agents, including Bolívar, his scribe and a translator. On 6 September 1815, Bolívar crafted the letter (in Spanish) in Kingston. It was handwritten by his political secretary and scribe Pedro Briceño Méndez (ES1), and within two weeks it was translated into English by John Robertson, a Canadian-born general from Bolívar's circle, so that the English-speaking recipient Mr. Cullen could read it (EN1).³ Three years later, the

2 For a more detailed account of the content of the letter in Spanish see Pisani Ricci (1965), Zeuske (2015) offers an overview in English. The complete letter in English is available in Lecuna and Bierck (1951, 103–22).

3 See Baraya (1874) for a biography of Pedro Briceño Méndez. General John Robertson (1767–1815) was a British officer born in Canada. In 1812 he joined the patriotic groups in Venezuela, fought alongside Bolívar and became a general of the Venezuelan republic (cf. Pereira 2015, 58–60). He died shortly after translating the *Carta de Jamaica*. Bolívar's letter of sympathy for his widow is available online (cf. Bolívar 1815). A short biography of Robertson was written by Carlos Pi Sunyer in 1971: *El General Juan Robertson, un prócer de la Independencia*. Caracas: Editorial Arte.

(anonymized) letter found publication in *The Jamaican Quarterly Journal and Literary Gazette* (EN2). It is very probable that Bolívar was aware and in favor of publishing the letter, since he was acquainted with almost all those involved in the process.

General Robertson died two months after creating the translation. In 1950, the manuscript of the English translation (EN1) discovered in Bogotá revealed its date and place of the creation: 20 September 1815 in Falmouth, a city on Jamaica's northern coast. It also included an apologetic note by the then still nameless translator:

When the translator of the letter approached his task, he was not aware of the difficulty of his commitment but began without any delay in order to please Mr. Cullen but also for his own benefit. He realizes that the restless and elegant style of general Bolívar has greatly suffered in the translation. But he hopes that his apologies for the inexpressive way the translation was done will find acceptance, since he had to carry out the task in great hurry and had not had the opportunity to practice his fondness for the Spanish language for five or six years.

Falmouth, 20th of September 1815.

(Cited in Navarro (1965, 347), my translation)

This note did not protect the translator from being treated unkindly by the critics of the 20th century. For example, since the English manuscript (EN1) shows corrections in Bolívar's handwriting it was concluded that the corrections by Bolívar were necessary because of the translator's poor knowledge of Spanish (cf. Mendoza 1972, 14).

The stage of *textualization* usually ends when the text exists in written form, and it is followed by the stage of *tradition*. This also applies to the Jamaica Letter. From 1830 onwards the letter was introduced into anthologies. Bolívar's death in 1830 also boosted the growing cult around him. But the Spanish manuscript (ES1) was nowhere to be found and the suspicion of back-translation was looming. It had to be erased by re-creating the original. In a way, textualization *in Spanish* had to be repeated to ensure the reliability of the text. The stage of *retextualization* encompasses these efforts.

6. Retextualization: Creating a “new original”

A little over a decade after its creation, the Spanish *Carta de Jamaica* was first included in a collection of Bolívar documents put together by Francisco Javier Yanes and Cristóbal de Mendoza (1826-1833 = ES2). These two men are the first in a line of collectors and biographers of Bolívar who were personally acquainted with him and/

or held powerful political office in the region. Cristóbal de Mendoza, for example, was named the first president of Venezuela in 1811 and bestowed the title of *Libertador* on Bolívar. In general, the collectors, biographers and historiographers were a quite homogenous group: men, mostly from wealthy Creole-families who were diplomats, university professors, lawyers and politicians or were active in the political and military struggle for independence themselves (this of course only applies to the “first generation” of collectors). Personal and political/ideological motives were their driving force to write history and influenced the way they depicted themselves and Bolívar (cf. Kremmel 2016, 54–60). This is best illustrated with the Mendoza family. More than a century after the Yanes-Mendoza edition, a lineal descendant of Cristóbal de Mendoza named Cristóbal L. Mendoza became a decisive figure for the *retextualization* of the Jamaica Letter. He was an influential historian, acted as president of the Venezuelan Bolivarian Society and headed the editorial committee for the influential critical edition of the *Carta de Jamaica* of 1972 (Mendoza 1972), which will be discussed below.

6.1 The phantom of back-translation

The *Carta de Jamaica* was first printed in Spanish in 1833 (ES2). The availability of the early English publications in Jamaica from 1818 and 1825 (EN2 and EN3) was very limited, and they were unknown on the South American mainland for many years.⁴ After Yanes and Mendoza (ES2) published the letter in their collection in 1833, it was reprinted a few times over the following decades (ES3–ES5), but it was version ES6 that caught academics’ attention. It was published in the memoirs of the general and diplomat Daniel O’Leary in 1883 (ES6). This version was also believed to be a back-translation into Spanish via the English translations published in Jamaica in 1818 and 1825 (EN2 and EN3). First, because O’Leary was an Irishman, and as an English native speaker might have known about the English publications in Jamaica. Second, because O’Leary had stated that it was transcribed from a Jamaican newspaper. This would have meant that O’Leary’s son, who edited the memoirs, had translated the letter from English into Spanish. But the Jamaica Letter published by O’Leary had actually been in Spanish all along. Thus, historians in the 1880s were confronted with two Spanish versions (ES2 and ES6), both assumed to be back-translations by

4 The letter was first published in *The Jamaican Quarterly Journal and Literary Gazette* in July 1818 under the title “General Bolívar’s Letter to a Friend, on the Subject of South American Independence (Translated from the Spanish)” and included an introductory comment. A few years later, in 1825, it was re-published in *The Jamaica Journal and Kingston Chronicle* in Kingston. The two editions are identical (cf. Mendoza 1972, 15–6) and were both published by the editor Alexander Aikman junior, who was the first to call the letter prophetic in a comment in 1825.

different translators, one by Yanes or Mendoza (ES2) and the other one by O’Leary junior (ES6).⁵

6.2 Countering back-translation

At first, the Spanish publications aimed at making the letter known and adding another facet to the image of Bolívar (see section 6 on the stage of *tradition*). But the group of academics in Venezuela who were funded by or connected to institutions such as the Venezuelan Academy of History or the Bolivarian Society pursued another goal: they wanted to dispel any doubts about this document and of the ideology of Bolívarianism expressed in it by searching for the original or, if the original was truly lost, at least by agreeing on its “authentic” reconstructed version. Thus the state or quasi-state institutions dominated the publication history and discourse of the Jamaica Letter in the 20th century. The work was carried out by committees created for this purpose by ministries, the presidency or the institutions mentioned above. The motivation of these actors is closely related to the tradition of the cult of Bolívar, and the predominant ideological interpretation and instrumentalization of the figure of Bolívar. With every new interpretation came new demands for retextualization.

These actors used different tools to interpret and understand Bolívar and the letter he had written. First, they conducted historical research to uncover the circumstances of textualization which ended the controversy about the identity of the translator (Robertson) and the commissioner of the first translation (Henry Cullen) of the manuscript in 1965 (Navarro 1965, 352, 354). Second, they carried out text comparisons of different version of the *Carta de Jamaica*. Third, they created different retranlations in an attempt to create a more “authentic” translation compared to the other existing versions that circulated at the time. These translations served varying purposes. The most basic distinction can be made between retranlations created for the general public (*ergo* pertaining to the stage of *tradition*) and those created for scholarly research, i.e., the many documentary translations. In their effort to create the best retranlation of the English version (EN1), they used the existing Spanish versions as parallel texts or merged the available versions into one, and thus believed that they came as close to the voice of the *Libertador* as possible.

5 As it turned out in the 21st century, both versions were copied from the Spanish manuscript (ES1) and had undergone some editorial changes. It must be pointed out that the differences were slight. The same is true for the other collections and anthologies that printed the letter in Spanish that, to no surprise, slightly diverge from previous versions because of editorial changes (e.g. ES3–ES5).

The publication and reception history of the *Carta de Jamaica* show that the letter was first published in anthologies and collections of correspondence in the second half of the 19th century (ES2, ES5, ES6) and early 20th century (ES7–9). Then, monographs solely dedicated to the letter and its context followed (ES10–12). The most detailed analyses, including comparisons of translations and different versions, appeared after 1950 (Cardot et al. 1965 (ES10), Sociedad Bolivariana de Venezuela 1967 (ES11), Mendoza 1972 (ES12)). The discovery of the manuscript of the English translation (EN1) in 1950 certainly boosted the interest in the text and its history, as well as occasions such as the 150th anniversary of the *Carta de Jamaica* in 1965 (ES10). From 1970 onwards, publications showing different versions side by side were published, the two most noteworthy ones from 1972 (Mendoza 1972, ES14) and 2015 (Sánchez 2015, ES18/ES1) were both commissioned and/or financed by the Venezuelan state. The critical edition of the *Carta de Jamaica* of 1972 shall now be discussed in detail, since it is the most extensive historical-critical edition of the text.

6.3 The critical edition of 1972: From many versions to one?

The historical-critical edition of the *Carta de Jamaica* of 1972 (ES12) was published in the spirit of a decree from the year before: In February of 1971, the Venezuelan president Rafael Caldera decreed that all educational facilities in the country should dedicate one week each year to the study of Bolívar, to analyze his actions and ideas and, of course, to “bestow on him the patriotic enthusiasm he deserves” (Mendoza 1972, my translation). This edition was therefore supposed to be used in educational institutions throughout the country. This publication is of interest because it reunites the two motives of the stages of *retextualization* and *tradition*. The two stated goals of the publication, indicated in its introduction, were to give a final form to the text (retextualization) and disseminate Bolívar’s body of thought (tradition):

The Editorial Commission of the Liberator’s Writings [...] has carried out a remarkable research effort to fix the text of the *Jamaica Letter*. With this edition, we hope to contribute to the greater dissemination of one of the fundamental testimonies of the thought of the Father of the Fatherland. (Mendoza 1972, n.p., my translation)

The introduction furthermore mentions the persisting assumption that the Spanish versions (ES2, ES6) were back-translations from English and argues that the *Carta de Jamaica* deserves in-depth analysis because of the accidents (or incidents) that mark the Spanish publication history and its importance in general. Mendoza, the head of the editorial commission, argues that in this edition the divergences between the

versions shall be cleared, and an exact version shall be presented (cf. Mendoza 1972, XIX), by closely looking at the context of creation of the different versions, identifying the changes “suffered” and reversing them (cf. Mendoza 1972, 3). The book includes ES2, the (oldest known) Spanish version by Yanes and Mendoza (1833) with added footnotes that mark the deviations of seven (!) other Spanish versions (ES1–6, ES9 and a partially printed letter from 1965), the English version from 1818 (EN2) as well as the English manuscript from 1815 (EN1) that was recovered in 1950. Then, the three oldest versions, ES2 (Yanes and Mendoza), EN1 and EN2 are printed side by side in columns to facilitate a comparison. As a product of this analysis, the publication presents the newly created “authenticated” (Mendoza 1972, 150) version of the *Carta de Jamaica* that is based on all the previously discussed documents (ES12). Therefore, this final version printed in the historical-critical edition is, according to the commission under Mendoza, no back-translation or retranslation, but a revision of the available Spanish versions only lightly influenced by the English source texts and could therefore be described as a compilative version. Mendoza also argued that ES2 was a copy of the manuscript and not a back-translation (Mendoza 1972, 21–22, my translation). The long-held assumption that O’Leary (1883, ES6) had transcribed the letter in his collection from a Jamaican newspaper and that his son had back-translated it into Spanish was also dismissed by Mendoza, since the textual analysis did not support it. This assumption had been causing troubles for many years, although the two versions only differed in small details (cf. Kremmel 2016, 71–73). So although the final proof was missing, because the Spanish manuscript (ES1) had not yet been found, this commission reached its final conclusion.

6.4 Arguments against the institutional standpoint

There was only one (public) critical response to the 1972 publication. The Mexican diplomat and Bolívar aficionado Francisco Cuevas Cancino was not convinced by the conclusions made by institutionalized Bolívarianism that now considered the available Spanish versions as slightly revised versions of the original manuscript (cf. Cuevas Cancino 1973, 1975). He was sure that the different Spanish versions were back-translations and that they could not be copies of the original manuscript. Cuevas Cancino supported his claim with the argument that the English manuscript (EN1) was longer than the Spanish versions (ES2, ES12), although English translations of Spanish source texts are usually shorter, and that the English version was very rich in adjectives, which was typical of Bolívar (cf. Cuevas Cancino 1975, 9–13):

How else could you explain that the English translation is richer and clearer than the Spanish document? How could you justify that it is the

Spanish, and not the English, that often provides a simplified text? Because if the Spanish version were the original, this simplicity would be inexplicable, due to the baroque nature of Bolívar's personality and the natural richness of his language. (Cuevas Cancino 1975, 13, my translation)

For him it was clear that EN1 was based on a Spanish source text that differed from ES2 or ES12. Cuevas Cancino (1975, 34) saw traces of a "rushed translation" as well as "suspicious additions" and "omissions" in the Yanes-Mendoza version (ES2). Although he admitted that in the end it might be a question of personal taste, he did not waver and offered a new Spanish back-translation (ES13/ES14) based on the English manuscript (EN1). Interestingly, Cuevas Cancino was the only notable critic arguing against the institutional standpoint, having no ties to the Venezuelan institutions. He thus created a new Spanish version of the letter that was openly declared to be a back-translation.

Despite all the efforts undertaken by the editorial commission under Mendoza (1972) to produce, or better fix, a legitimized version, other Spanish versions continued to circulate and also served as source texts for new translations into different languages.⁶ It is surprising that the aim of the historical-critical edition of 1972 was to replace all other Spanish version of the letter with ES12 as the one "true" version, since most of the other canonized documents by Bolívar also circulate in diverging versions.

7. Tradition: The role of the Jamaica Letter in the cult surrounding Bolívar

The stage of tradition covers the processes of institutionalization in written or oral form. The written tradition is based on codification (meaning the processes of collecting, sifting through, putting into writing, archiving and copying of texts) as well as canonization (a selective interference into tradition) (cf. Assmann 1990, 46). These processes can take centuries or even millennia. Without canonization, the tide of tradition would wash away the text's original form and placement (cf. Assmann 1990, 46), canonization therefore fixes the text. With its unstable origin, the Jamaica Letter was cause for concern, it was an assumed translation amongst originals and therefore not considered suited to

6 Romero and Romero (1977, ES16) use the version ES7 by Blanco Fombona (1913), Becerra Rondón (1984, ES17) uses a similar but not identical version without indicating the source. The anthology by *Biblioteca Ayacucho* (2010) reprints the version ES9 from the collection by Lecuna (1947) with modernized punctuation and spelling, the first German translation König/ König (transl.) (1985) uses the same version (published in 1967 by the Bolivarian Society of Venezuela (ES17)).

fulfill its role as a founding text of Bolivarianism. The stage of *retextualization* was, as seen above, dedicated to these processes of creating a “new original”.

The stage of tradition of the *Carta de Jamaica* needs to be seen in the context of the historiographical narrative of *Independencia* and the struggle for creating a National History. With that, the political and personal motives and aims of the agents engaged with the *Carta de Jamaica* become clear. The *Carta de Jamaica* is included in all noteworthy collections of Bolívar’s writings, often side by side with the *Cartagena manifesto* (1812) and the *Angostura discourse* (1819). The three documents are referred to as the “trinity” of Bolivarian documents. Each of these represents a different phase of the struggle for independence, and therefore the trinity shows the whole range of Bolívar’s development and success (cf. Kremmel 2016, 81–82). All three documents cover general political and societal issues, outlining historical events and future scenarios. Thus, the documents are open for re-interpretation and have become “central” texts in the Assmannian sense. Centrality is not an inherent characteristic of a text; it is the result of cultural decisions and effort (cf. Assmann 1990, 48). The exact composition of the text was still debated during the phase of *retextualization*, when different Spanish versions were competing. The collected documents and letters of Bolívar had the task of forming the corpus that was the foundation of the myth of Bolívar (cf. Zeuske 2015). The suspicion of having a back-translation as a founding stone of the historiography of *Independencia* is what drove the agents involved to find the one “true” version.

The relationship between an original and translation and the inferior status assigned to the latter has been discussed intensively within and outside the discipline of translation studies. Deconstructivist thinkers in particular have contributed to a shift in perspective in this regard. But still, “[w]hile the original is generally associated with stability, with what is present, primary and authentic, a translation is often related to precariousness and the absence of what is unconditionally legitimate” (Arrojo 1997, 21). The potentially very positive role of back-translation as “survivor of the lost original” (cf. Santoyo 2006, 28) was hardly ever pointed out in the publications of the *Carta de Jamaica*, although it was, presumably, the only way a Spanish speaking audience could access the text. The publications aimed at dissemination (in Spanish, but also other languages) of the Jamaica Letter seldomly mention the controversy about the text or reveal its status of an assumed back-translation. This was an issue only the experts and editors were occupied with. The fact that the assumed back-translation, and before that, the translation into English, was what conserved Bolívar’s thoughts and ideas was not appreciated. With that being said the Jamaica Letter can, without doubt, be characterized as a central and general document in Assmannian terms. Its original function, a letter from one individual to another, faded away quickly. It became part of the publicly available body of writing. A tradition thus formed, culminating in the

celebration of anniversaries of its creation, accompanied by celebratory editions (e.g. ES10, ES18) and a status not many texts achieve.

Almost twenty years passed between the discovery of the Spanish manuscript of the *Carta de Jamaica* in Quito in 1996 and its publication (and celebration) in Venezuela in 2015 (Zambrano 2015). Religious, cultural or political key texts are often subject to lengthy and extensive analyses and cause ideological struggle surrounding their interpretation. The institutionalization of these processes is also far from uncommon. But the fact that it took almost two decades to gather the institutional support and confirm the authenticity of the manuscript could also indicate that the interest of Venezuelan institutions and Bolivarians had declined since the late 1970s. Still, it is worth noticing that it is only with the ceremonial act on Bolívar Square in Caracas in 2015 celebrating the 200th anniversary of the letter, and the symbolic presentation of the original manuscript to the Venezuelan people, that all doubts surrounding the circumstances of creation, form and content of the *Carta de Jamaica* were considered resolved.⁷

8. Concluding remarks

There are various different conclusions to draw from this paper. First, this paper's intent was to reveal through the case of the *Carta de Jamaica* the role and conception of translation in the discourse on a key text. And second, this study attempted to show the value of the methodological approach offered by Jan Assmann, whose text production process model can help structure and organize the publication history of key cultural or political texts, which are often documented extensively. But the model is more than an organizational device. Depending on the stage and development of discourse, the demands and expectations from the text and motives of the involved actors (translators, patrons, institutions, academia) can change. The application of this model makes it easier to identify the motives of different actors and understand why a translation takes a certain shape, and how the motive and the type of translation relate to the ongoing discourse. The model also encourages researchers to look beyond one specific translation event, and thus leads them to a better understanding of the phenomenon as a whole.

It would be interesting to speculate how the discourse and publication history of the Jamaica Letter would have developed without the assumption that the Spanish versions of the letter from the 19th century were back-translations. We might assume that there still would have been critical editions comparing and studying different versions

7 The celebratory act was covered by the press, see for example: <https://www.telesurtv.net/news/Venezuela-conmemora-los-200-anos-de-la-Carta-de-Jamaica-20150906-0170.html> (Accessed August, 2020).

of the text. In fact, this is not an unusual process for the stage of *tradition*. However, had there not been an English translation done in 1815 (EN1), there would have been little reason to assume that the Spanish version was a back-translation from English. The fact that the first *published* version was an English version seemed to have triggered the controversy. In combination with the unavailable manuscripts of the Spanish letter (ES1) and the English translation (EN1), there were enough blank spaces for these assumptions to form.

What can be said about the discourse on the Jamaica Letter and translation after the discovery of the manuscript of the Spanish original in 1994 and its publication in 2015? On the one hand, one could simply say that all comparative textual scrutiny and effort was in vain, because the assumption of back-translation turned out to be unfounded. On the other hand, we can observe that the obsession with finding the version closest to the voice of the *Libertador* led historians and Bolívar admirers to pay close attention to the text, and eventually solve the mystery of its creation. In comparison to other documents by Bolívar, there was still research to be done on this letter and combined with the assumption of translation it was the perfect opportunity for the agents involved to prove themselves, show their knowledge of Bolívar's style of expression, his way of thinking, *modus operandi*, etc. This was furthered by institutional support and funding, primarily from Venezuela. The emerging nation states in the region and the mechanisms of power become visible when retracing the process of canonization and publication (cf. Gerling 2008, 43), and manifest themselves in the form of commissions by the state or presidency, the funding of publications, organizations and committees with state authority and patriotic historiographers. The number of drafts, versions, translations and paratexts proves the “representativeness” of the document and the many perspectives and interpretations it allows.

As discussed already, the assumption that the Spanish *Carta de Jamaica* is a retranslation and back-translation was considered a problem throughout the textual history of the Jamaica Letter, particularly once it became part of the “trinity” of Bolívar's testimony. When the text reached this special status, retranslations and back-translations were used as tools to resolve the issue. Those who tried to control the narrative by checking each version letter by letter, be it institutional actors or “outsiders” such as Francisco Cuevas Cancino, created even more versions in the form of documentary translations that they then declared the closest version to the original, adding another layer to the “palimpsest” of the *Carta de Jamaica*. In this stage of *retextualization*, the agents were thus forced to see the original from the perspective of the translation in order to reconstruct (retextualize) the original.

The aim of the institutions, historiographers and cult surrounding Bolívar (cf. Zeuske 2011) was to *find* the *one* true version of the *Carta de Jamaica*, and if that was not possible

create the *truest* version. In doing so, however, they achieved quite the opposite. They themselves created and brought (back) into circulation a number of versions of the document in more than one language. The search for the original led to many “originals”. Before the original manuscript was uncovered in 1995 and presented to the public in 2015, another version had already been canonized: the version by Yanes and Mendoza (ES2) that has been printed and widely publicized, which makes it hard to replace now. The power of tradition seems to be stronger than the resurfaced original manuscript.

This case shows, once again, that translation does not equal loss. In fact, translation can be the only vehicle available to recuperate what was lost. But as the case of Spanish versions of the letter also shows, the assumption of back-translation alone can trigger a chain of translations, comparisons and value judgements that create a lively publication history. Researching the translation history of such cases sheds light on the fact that thematization, textualization and tradition are not linear processes but complex and sometimes simultaneous occurrences. And finally, it also confirms the need for translation history to look at different functions of translation in the publication history of key cultural or political texts.

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Appendix

Chronology of (complete) versions of the *Carta de Jamaica* mentioned in this paper. The most relevant versions are shaded in grey.

Abbr.	Date	Description	Place of creation/ publication
ES1	1815	Original Spanish manuscript. Vanished after 1815. Its rediscovery was made public in 2015 (=ES19). Manuscript available at https://albaciudad.org/wp-content/uploads/2015/09/CARTA-DE-JAMAICA-2.pdf (accessed June, 2020)	Kingston, Jamaica
EN1	1815	Original manuscript of the English translation discovered in 1950.	Falmouth, Jamaica
EN2	1818	First publication of the letter in English translation (anonymized version of EN1) in the journal <i>The Jamaican Quarterly Journal and Literary Gazette</i> Bolívar, Simon / Robertson, John (transl.). 1818. “General Bolívar’s Letter to a Friend, on the Subject of South American Independence (Translated from the Spanish).” <i>The Jamaican Quarterly Journal and Literary Gazette</i> 1 (3): 162–74.	Kingston, Jamaica
EN3	1825	Second publication of the letter in English translation (anonymized version of EN1) in the journal <i>The Jamaican Journal and Kingston Chronicle</i> Bolívar, Simon / Robertson, John (transl.) (23/06/1825) “General Bolívar’s Letter to a Friend, on the Subject of South American Independence (Translated from the Spanish).” <i>The Jamaica Journal and Kingston Chronicle</i> III (30): 162–74.	Kingston, Jamaica
ES2	1833	First Spanish publication in a collection of Bolívar’s documents by Yanes & Mendoza. Assumed back-translation that is actually a copy of ES1 with slight editorial changes. Yanes, Francisco Javier & Mendoza, Cristóbal (eds.). 1826–1833. <i>Colección de Documentos relativos a la Vida Pública del Libertador de Colombia y del Perú, Simón Bolívar, para servir a la historia de la Independencia de Sur-América</i> . 22 volumes. Caracas.	Caracas, Venezuela
ES3	1853	Printed in a biography on Bolívar, based on ES2. Cipriano de Mosquera, Tomás. 1853. <i>Memorias sobre la vida del Libertador Simón Bolívar</i> . New York: Imprenta de S. W. Benedict.	New York, US
ES4	1854	Printed in a book on military history of Venezuela during the <i>Independencia</i> de Austria, Jose. 1854. <i>Bosquejo de la Historia Militar de Venezuela en la guerra de su Independencia</i> . Caracas: Imprenta y Librería de Carreño Hermanos.	Caracas, Venezuela

ES5	1876	Printed in a Collection of Documents of Bolívar. No indication of source. Blanco, José Félix & Azpurúa, Ramón, eds. 1876. <i>Documentos para la historia de la vida pública del Libertador de Colombia, Perú y Bolivia</i> . Publicados por disposición del General Guzmán Blanco, Ilustre Americano, Regenerador y Presidente de los Estados Unidos de Venezuela, en 1875. 16 volumes. Caracas: Imprenta de “La Opinión Nacional”.	Caracas, Venezuela
ES6	1883	Part of the memoirs of general Daniel F. O’Leary. Assumed back-translation based on EN2/EN3, actually an edited version of ES1/ES2. O’Leary, Daniel Florencio and Simón Bolívar, eds. 1879-1888. <i>Memorias del General O’Leary</i> , publicadas por su hijo Simon B. O’Leary, por orden del Gobierno de Venezuela y bajo los auspicios de su Presidente General Guzmán Blanco, Ilustre Americano, Regenerador de la República, 32 volumes. Caracas: Imprenta de “El Monitor”. Digitized version available at: http://bibliotecadigital.aecid.es/bibliodig/i18n/consulta/registro.cmd?id=557	Caracas, Venezuela
ES7	1913	Included in a collection of Bolívar’s letters. Blanco Fombona, Rufino, ed. 1912/1913. <i>Cartas de Bolívar: 1799 à 1822. Prólogo de José Enrique Rodó y notas de Rufino Blanco-Fombona</i> . París/Buenos Aires: Louis-Micheaud.	Paris, France & New York, USA
ES8	1929	Included in a collection of Bolívar’s letters. Vicente Lecuna, ed. 1929. <i>Cartas del Libertador, 1799–1817</i> , Caracas. Volume 1.	Caracas, Venezuela
ES9	1947	Printed in an anthology of full works of Bolívar. Lecuna, Vicente, and Barret de Nazaris, Esther, eds. 1947. <i>Obras Completas de Simón Bolívar</i> . La Habana: Editorial Lex; Caracas: Ministerio de Educación nacional de los Estados Unidos de Venezuela.	Caracas, Venezuela & La Habana, Cuba
ES10	1965	Celebratory publication for the 150 th anniversary of Carta de Jamaica. Reveals the identity of recipient Cullen and translator Robertson. Felice Cardot, Carlos, Parra Márquez, Héctor, and Guerrero, Luis Beltrán, eds. 1965. Edición Conmemorativa de la Carta de Jamaica. <i>Boletín de la Academia Nacional de la Historia</i> XLVIII: 191, 315–83.	Caracas, Venezuela
ES11	1967	= ES9 Sociedad Bolivariana de Venezuela, ed. 1967. <i>Carta de Jamaica</i> . Los Teques: Casa de la Cultura, 9–53. http://bdigital.binal.ac.pa/bdp/jamaica.pdf .	Los Teques, Venezuela

ES12	1972	Discusses EN1, EN2, ES2-ES6, ES9 and a partial publication of 1865. ES12 is presented as the “authenticated and legitimized” version. Comisión Editora bajo Cristóbal L. Mendoza, eds. 1972. <i>Carta de Jamaica</i> . Caracas: Ediciones de la Presidencia de la República.	Caracas, Venezuela
ES13	1973	New Spanish back-translation based on EN2. Cuevas Cancino, and Francisco Cuevas. 1973. Una nueva versión española de la Carta de Jamaica. <i>Historia Mexicana</i> 23 (1): 145–75.	Mexico
ES14	1975	Monograph with exact reprint of ES13. Cuevas Cancino, Francisco. 1975. <i>La Carta de Jamaica redescubierta</i> . México D.F.: El Colegio de México.	Mexico D.F., Mexico
ES15	1976	Anthology on Bolívar’s doctrine, includes version ES9 with modernized spelling Pérez Vila, Manuel, Mijares, Augusto, and García Riera, Gladys, eds. 1976 [2010]. <i>Doctrina del libertador</i> . Caracas: Fundación Biblioteca Ayacucho y Banco Central de Venezuela.	Caracas, Venezuela
ES16	1977	Included in an anthology of political texts of South American emancipation. Romero, José Luis, and Romero, Luis Alberto, eds. 1977. <i>Pensamiento político de la emancipación (1790–1825)</i> , vol. 2. Caracas: Fundación Biblioteca Ayacucho y Banco Central de Venezuela.	Caracas, Venezuela
ES17	1984	Included in the annex of a monograph on the letter. Becerra Rondón, Simón. 1984. <i>Contestación a la Carta de Jamaica</i> . Caracas: Comité Ejecutivo del Bicentenario de Simón Bolívar.	Caracas, Venezuela
ES18 (=ES1)	2015	Anniversary edition with the rediscovered manuscript ES1. Comisión Presidencial (para la Conmemoración del Bicentenario de la Carta de Jamaica). 2015. <i>Carta de Jamaica 1815–2015</i> . Edited by Simón Andrés Sánchez. Venezuela: Colección Unidad Nuestraamericana.	Caracas, Venezuela
ES19	2015	Includes ES1, modernized version of ES1 & ES15. Published on the occasion of the 200 th anniversary of the <i>Carta de Jamaica</i> . Ortiz Bruzual, Carlos. ed. 2015. <i>Carta de Jamaica y otros textos</i> . Caracas: Fundación Biblioteca Ayacucho y Banco Central de Venezuela.	Caracas, Venezuela

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